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JBHE's Updated Ranking of the States According to Black-White SAT Scoring Gaps
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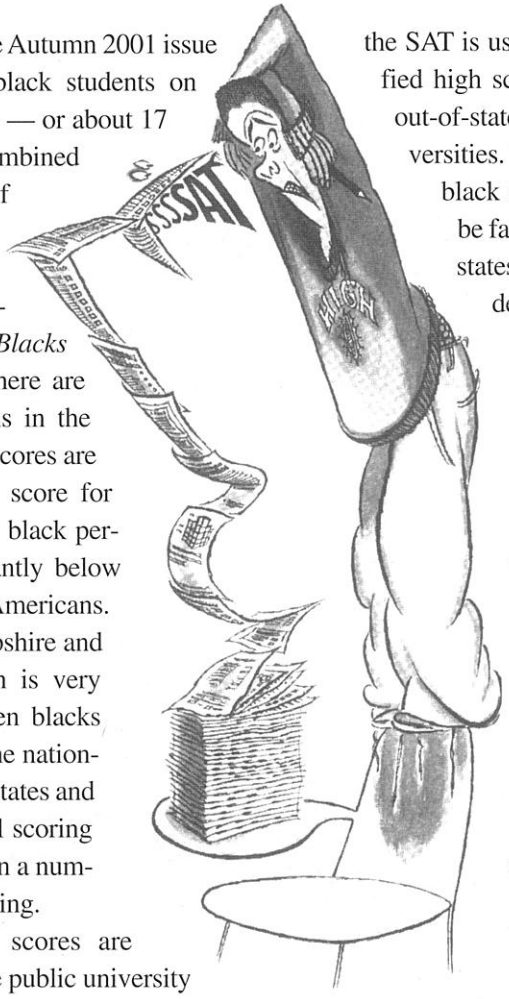
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# JBHE's Updated Ranking of the States According to Black-White SAT Scoring Gaps

*In JBHE's current tally of the states, the SAT performance gap between blacks and whites is as low as 44 points in North Dakota to a high of 456 points in the District of Columbia. As expected, the SAT gap is lowest in states that have few, if any, racially segregated inner-city schools. The gap is the highest in the District of Columbia where very large numbers of white students attend quality private schools, whereas most blacks are enrolled at inferior and almost all-black public schools.*

AS WE REPORTED in the Autumn 2001 issue of JBHE, nationwide, black students on average score 201 points — or about 17 percent — below whites on the combined mathematics and verbal portions of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). But statistics obtained from The College Board and recently analyzed by *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* show that there are very large state-by-state variations in the results. In many states black SAT scores are far higher than the average SAT score for blacks nationwide. In other states, black performance on the SAT is significantly below the national average for African Americans. In some states, such as New Hampshire and Utah where the black population is very low, the SAT scoring gap between blacks and whites is much smaller than the nationwide average of 201. But in some states and the District of Columbia the racial scoring gap on the SAT is very large, and in a number of states the racial gap is growing.




The variations in black SAT scores are strongly influenced by whether the public university system in a given state requires the SAT for its applicants or whether instead the state system prefers the admission test of the American College Testing Program (ACT).* In states in which most students take the ACT test, the SAT is usually taken only by the state's best qualified high school students who are looking to attend out-of-state and usually prestigious colleges and universities. Therefore, the mean SAT scores for both black and white students in these states tend to be far higher than the mean SAT scores in other states in which almost all college-bound students take the SAT.

For example, in 2001 the mean SAT score for blacks in New York, a state in which 77 percent of all high school graduates take the SAT test, was 865. In Illinois, where only 12 percent of all high school graduates take the SAT (and they tend to be the most academically talented students who are looking to attend elite out-of-state colleges), the mean SAT score for blacks was 987. Blacks score higher in Illinois than in New York, not because blacks in the state are smarter or attend better schools, but because the SAT results in the state are measuring two radically different pools of test takers.

### Problems in Compiling a State-by-State Scorecard

When we compare the scores of blacks and whites *within any particular state*, we are comparing for the most part two groups with roughly similar educational aspirations. In a state such as Illinois, where the state university system prefers applicants to take the ACT test, both blacks and whites who take the SAT tend to be the top high school students in that state. Thus, while it is not statistically fair to compare black and white scores on the SAT in Illinois to black and white scores in other states such as New York, where the SAT is the preferred test for

*The SAT is the preferred college admission examination among the states along both East and West coasts and in Alaska, Hawaii, Texas, Vermont, and Indiana. The standardized test of the American College Testing (ACT) program for college admission is the preferred test in the other states, most of which are in the nation's midsection. As an example of the different test preferences, 82 percent of all high school graduates in the state of Connecticut take the SAT whereas only 4 percent of all high school graduates in Mississippi take the SAT.



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college admission, it is meaningful to compare how well blacks perform compared to whites on the SAT *within* Illinois. It is also useful to compare SAT results for blacks and whites within every other state.

Black SAT test takers in North Dakota produced the overall highest scores in the nation. Blacks in North Dakota had an average combined SAT score of 1157. However, because the University of North Dakota and other state-operated colleges and universities in the state prefer applicants to take the ACT test, only 4 percent of all high school seniors in the state took the SAT. There were only six blacks who took the SAT in North Dakota this year. These six black students did particularly well on the SAT, scoring nearly 100 points higher than the nationwide white mean.

Similar results took place in Utah, another state in which the ACT is the preferred college admission test. In Utah, only 15 blacks took the SAT. But they performed very well on the test with a mean score of 1077, 17 points above the nationwide white mean.

Blacks in Pennsylvania who took the SAT scored the lowest combined score of African Americans for any state in the nation. (Black students in the District of Columbia scored even lower.) In Pennsylvania almost all college-bound high school students take the SAT, which is not the case in Utah and other states where blacks scored the highest on the SAT. Thus, it is irrelevant to compare black SAT scores in Pennsylvania with black SAT scores in Utah because we are comparing a completely different pool of test takers with significantly different academic qualifications.

## Comparing Black and White Students Within the Same State

A more meaningful comparison occurs when we look at how blacks in a particular

**It Is Only in States With Small Black Populations That Black SAT Scores Are Nearly Equal to White Scores**

*SAT Participation and Scores by State and Race in the Year 2000*

*(Ranked by the Smallest Black-White SAT Gap)*

| State | Percentage of High School Graduates Who Take the SAT | Percentage of All SAT Test Takers Who Are Black | White Combined SAT Score | Black Combined SAT Score | Black-White Gap |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Dakota* | 4 % | 1.6 % | 1201 | 1157 | 44 |
| New Hampshire* | 72 | 0.9 | 1036 | 971 | 65 |
| Utah* | 5 | 1.1 | 1163 | 1077 | 86 |
| Idaho* | 17 | 0.3 | 1091 | 972 | 119 |
| Maine* | 69 | 0.8 | 1016 | 882 | 134 |
| New Mexico* | 13 | 3.1 | 1127 | 988 | 139 |
| Hawaii* | 52 | 1.6 | 1057 | 916 | 141 |
| Vermont* | 69 | 0.6 | 1025 | 879 | 146 |
| Nevada | 33 | 6.4 | 1041 | 892 | 149 |
| Washington | 53 | 3.0 | 1065 | 908 | 157 |
| Arizona | 34 | 4.0 | 1073 | 908 | 165 |
| Colorado | 31 | 3.3 | 1092 | 923 | 169 |
| Indiana | 60 | 6.0 | 1013 | 840 | 173 |
| West Virginia | 18 | 3.6 | 1040 | 864 | 176 |
| Georgia | 63 | 26.2 | 1030 | 852 | 178 |
| Minnesota* | 9 | 2.7 | 1180 | 998 | 182 |
| Oregon | 55 | 1.9 | 1064 | 882 | 182 |
| Oklahoma | 8 | 7.2 | 1145 | 962 | 183 |
| Rhode Island | 71 | 4.7 | 1029 | 845 | 184 |
| New York | 77 | 12.3 | 1051 | 865 | 186 |
| Louisiana | 7 | 16.8 | 1161 | 974 | 187 |
| South Carolina | 57 | 27.3 | 1029 | 841 | 188 |
| Florida | 54 | 14.4 | 1045 | 855 | 190 |
| Massachusetts | 79 | 5.2 | 1048 | 857 | 191 |
| Kansas | 9 | 3.6 | 1172 | 979 | 193 |
| Illinois | 12 | 7.3 | 1181 | 987 | 194 |
| Alaska | 51 | 3.5 | 1057 | 860 | 197 |
| Arkansas | 6 | 8.9 | 1134 | 933 | 201 |
| **National Average SATs** | **45** | **9.4** | **1060** | **859** | **201** |
| Delaware | 67 | 16.5 | 1038 | 835 | 203 |
| Ohio | 26 | 8.5 | 1090 | 886 | 204 |
| Pennsylvania | 71 | 7.7 | 1022 | 817 | 205 |
| Texas | 53 | 12.0 | 1051 | 846 | 205 |
| North Carolina | 65 | 21.3 | 1041 | 835 | 206 |
| Kentucky | 12 | 5.0 | 1110 | 904 | 206 |
| Virginia | 68 | 17.6 | 1054 | 848 | 206 |
| Iowa* | 5 | 2.3 | 1205 | 998 | 207 |
| New Jersey | 81 | 11.7 | 1057 | 850 | 207 |
| Tennessee | 13 | 10.3 | 1140 | 932 | 208 |
| Montana* | 23 | 0.2 | 1081 | 872 | 209 |
| California | 51 | 6.9 | 1080 | 867 | 213 |
| Connecticut | 82 | 8.1 | 1054 | 836 | 218 |
| Mississippi | 4 | 18.5 | 1159 | 936 | 223 |
| Nebraska | 8 | 3.3 | 1141 | 917 | 224 |
| Michigan | 11 | 14.0 | 1164 | 934 | 230 |
| Alabama | 9 | 16.1 | 1154 | 923 | 231 |
| Maryland | 65 | 26.4 | 1086 | 853 | 233 |
| Missouri | 8 | 8.2 | 1182 | 946 | 236 |
| Wisconsin | 6 | 4.8 | 1199 | 942 | 257 |
| District of Columbia | 53 | 59.7 | 1253 | 797 | 456 |

**Note:** Due to the very small number of black SAT test takers, the College Board did not post the results for blacks in South Dakota or Wyoming. Readers are cautioned that in states marked with an asterisk the number of black SAT test takers is so small that the results cannot be considered statistically significant.

*Source: The College Board.*

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**States With the Highest Black SAT Scores, 2001**

*In all states, except North Dakota and Utah, the mean score of blacks is below the nationwide mean score of whites. The mean white score stands at 1060.*

| | |
|---|---|
| North Dakota | 1157 |
| Utah | 1077 |
| Iowa | 998 |
| New Mexico | 988 |
| Illinois | 987 |
| Kansas | 979 |
| Louisiana | 972 |
| Idaho | 972 |
| New Hampshire | 971 |

**Note:** Other than in New Hampshire, most college-bound students in these states take the ACT college admission test. Only students who apply to the nation's highest-ranked colleges and universities from these states take the SAT. This tends to inflate black SAT scores in these states well above the national average for African Americans.

state score on the SAT *compared to white student test takers in the same state*. Using this comparison we can determine the black-white SAT scoring gap *within* each state. Then we can compare the black-white gap from one state to another.

Consider the following: In 2001 blacks in Mississippi had a composite score of 936 on the SAT. Blacks in South Carolina had a composite score of only 841. At first glance one would conclude that blacks in Mississippi were doing far better than blacks in South Carolina. However, in Mississippi only the academically strongest students seeking to attend Ivy League or other prestigious out-of-state colleges take the SAT. Most high school students take the ACT test. This factor raises the average black SAT score in Mississippi.

But in South Carolina nearly all college-bound high school graduates take the SAT. Thus, the gap in SAT scores between black students in Mississippi and black students in South Carolina is largely explained by the fact that we are comparing an entirely different group of test takers.

*"Since 1988 the steady progress in closing the racial SAT gap has not only come to a screeching halt, it has reversed."*

But when we compare the black-to-white SAT results *within each state*, an entirely different picture emerges. The black-white SAT scoring gap in South Carolina is 188 points, or 13 points, *better* than the national black-white SAT gap. In Mississippi the black-white scoring gap is much larger at 223 points, or 22 points greater than the national black-white SAT gap. Thus, when compared to whites within their own state, blacks are actually faring better on the SAT in South Carolina than they are in Mississippi. This suggests that blacks in South Carolina are receiving K-12 education that is more equal in quality to that of whites than is the case in Mississippi.

The SAT scoring gap between blacks and whites was lowest in the state of North Dakota. There the black combined SAT score of 1157 was only 44 points below the composite white score of 1201. Once more we note that only six blacks in the entire state of North Dakota took the SAT. North Dakota is also for the most part a rural state that does not have any heavily black inner-city schools where standardized test scores are generally low.

The SAT scoring gap in 2001 was also well below the national average in Utah, New Hampshire, Idaho, Maine, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Vermont. But here, once more, all of these states have very few black students and few areas of urban segregation. Therefore, it is likely that blacks in these states for the most part receive a secondary education equal in quality to that of white students.

*"Blacks score higher in Illinois than in New York, not because blacks in the state are smarter or attend better schools, but because the SAT results in the state are measuring two radically different pools of test takers."*

The SAT racial score gap was the greatest, by a large margin, in the District of Columbia. Blacks in the District had a combined SAT score of 797, or a huge 456 points below the median white score of 1253 in the District. However, the District presents an extremely different set of black and white students. Very large numbers of white high school students in the District are educated in high-quality, private preparatory schools, whereas almost all black students receive their education in the financially strapped and largely dilapidated D.C. public school system.

## States in Which Blacks Have Improved Their SAT Scores

Without regard to the makeup of the pool of test takers or the percentage of students who take the SAT, it is useful to note where black SAT scores have risen or declined in the past several years.

**States With the Lowest Black SAT Scores in the Year 2001**

| | |
|---|---|
| Dist. of Columbia | 797 |
| Pennsylvania | 817 |
| Delaware | 835 |
| North Carolina | 835 |
| Connecticut | 836 |
| Indiana | 840 |
| South Carolina | 841 |
| Rhode Island | 845 |
| Texas | 846 |



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Whether we are comparing states in which only the most highly qualified high school graduates take the SAT or states in which a vast majority of high school graduates take the test, any improvement in black SAT scores is worth noting.

Since 1987 blacks nationwide have improved their combined verbal and math SAT scores from 839 to 859, a modest increase of 1.4 percent. Despite the national trend, there have been wide variations among the states in the scoring trend for blacks on the SAT. For example, in Michigan the mean SAT score for black students rose from 856 in 1987 to 934 in 2001, a rise of 78 points, or 5.5 percent. This was the largest increase in the nation. Perhaps many academically talented black students in Michigan have been turned off by the controversy over affirmative action admissions at the University of Michigan. Instead of applying to the University of Michigan, which does not require the SAT, many of these bright black students may be applying to out-of-state colleges and universities that do require the SAT. A larger number of top black students taking the SAT in Michigan may be the primary reason why the overall SAT scores for blacks have risen in recent years. However, the good news on black SAT scores in Michigan is somewhat tempered by the fact that only a small percentage of black high school graduates in Michigan take the SAT.

*"Significant SAT score improvements that were greater than the national average were recorded by black students in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia."*

Illinois had the second-highest rise in black SAT scores. But here again the small number of black SAT test takers in this state means that the statistics cannot be assumed to be establishing any sort of lasting trend.

Large SAT point gains by college-bound blacks also occurred in Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Missouri. Yet in these states the ACT test is taken by most high school students. The SAT test score improvement in these states is for a small minority of all black college-bound students. Nevertheless, the improvement shows that the brightest black students in these states are improving their test scores by a significant degree, permitting them to better compete with whites for admittance to the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities.

**States Where Black SAT Scores Have Shown the Most Improvement**

*(Ranked by Black SAT Score Improvement, 1987-2001)*

| State | Black Combined SAT Score 1987 | Black Combined SAT Score 2001 | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Michigan | 856 | 934 | +78 |
| Illinois | 916 | 987 | +71 |
| Oklahoma | 903 | 962 | +59 |
| New Mexico | 930 | 988 | +58 |
| Missouri | 889 | 946 | +57 |
| Georgia | 805 | 852 | +47 |
| Minnesota | 951 | 998 | +47 |
| South Carolina | 795 | 841 | +46 |
| North Carolina | 790 | 835 | +45 |
| Colorado | 889 | 923 | +34 |
| Wisconsin | 911 | 942 | +31 |
| Alabama | 895 | 923 | +28 |
| Washington | 882 | 908 | +26 |
| Texas | 821 | 846 | +25 |
| Louisiana | 949 | 972 | +23 |
| New Jersey | 827 | 850 | +23 |
| Florida | 834 | 855 | +21 |
| **National Average** | **839** | **859** | **+20** |
| Indiana | 822 | 840 | +18 |
| Alaska | 844 | 860 | +16 |
| Nebraska | 901 | 917 | +16 |
| Kansas | 964 | 979 | +15 |
| New York | 853 | 865 | +12 |
| California | 858 | 867 | +9 |
| Massachusetts | 848 | 857 | +9 |
| Ohio | 877 | 886 | +9 |
| Hawaii | 908 | 916 | +8 |
| Mississippi | 930 | 936 | +6 |
| Oregon | 878 | 882 | +4 |
| Connecticut | 834 | 836 | +2 |
| Iowa | 996 | 998 | +2 |
| Rhode Island | 843 | 845 | +2 |
| Maryland | 853 | 853 | 0 |
| Nevada | 892 | 892 | 0 |
| Arkansas | 934 | 933 | -1 |
| Arizona | 914 | 908 | -6 |
| Maine | 888 | 882 | -6 |
| Delaware | 845 | 835 | -10 |
| Pennsylvania | 830 | 817 | -13 |
| Kentucky | 918 | 904 | -14 |
| District of Columbia | 815 | 797 | -18 |
| West Virginia | 886 | 864 | -22 |
| Tennessee | 969 | 932 | -37 |
| New Hampshire | 1038 | 971 | -67 |
| Vermont | 967 | 879 | -88 |

**Note:** There are not enough black SAT test takers in the states of Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Utah, or Wyoming to produce statistically significant results.

*Source: The College Board.* Table © *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.*



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**States Where Blacks Have Shown the Best SAT Improvement Relative to Whites**

*(Ranked by Black-White SAT Score Gap Improvement 1987-2001)*

| State | Black-White SAT Score Gap 1987 | Black-White SAT Score Gap 2001 | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| New Mexico | 196 | 139 | -57 |
| Colorado | 200 | 169 | -31 |
| Oklahoma | 210 | 183 | -27 |
| Michigan | 253 | 230 | -23 |
| Washington | 179 | 157 | -22 |
| Nebraska | 234 | 224 | -10 |
| Georgia | 187 | 178 | -9 |
| South Carolina | 195 | 188 | -7 |
| Alaska | 202 | 197 | -5 |
| Florida | 193 | 190 | -3 |
| Arizona | 165 | 165 | 0 |
| Alabama | 230 | 231 | +1 |
| Indiana | 171 | 173 | +2 |
| West Virginia | 174 | 176 | +2 |
| Virginia | 204 | 206 | +4 |
| North Carolina | 199 | 206 | +7 |
| New York | 178 | 186 | +8 |
| Nevada | 140 | 149 | +9 |
| Mississippi | 213 | 223 | +10 |
| New Jersey | 197 | 207 | +10 |
| Texas | 195 | 205 | +10 |
| **National Average** | **191** | **201** | **+10** |
| Delaware | 191 | 203 | +12 |
| Maine | 121 | 134 | +13 |
| Missouri | 223 | 236 | +13 |
| Ohio | 191 | 204 | +13 |
| Kansas | 179 | 193 | +14 |
| Illinois | 178 | 194 | +16 |
| Hawaii | 124 | 141 | +17 |
| Iowa | 190 | 207 | +17 |
| Massachusetts | 174 | 191 | +17 |
| Rhode Island | 166 | 184 | +18 |
| California | 194 | 213 | +19 |
| Kentucky | 185 | 206 | +21 |
| Arkansas | 179 | 201 | +22 |
| Oregon | 161 | 182 | +21 |
| Connecticut | 196 | 218 | +22 |
| Pennsylvania | 182 | 205 | +23 |
| Minnesota | 156 | 182 | +26 |
| Louisiana | 160 | 187 | +27 |
| Maryland | 204 | 233 | +29 |
| Wisconsin | 203 | 257 | +54 |
| Tennessee | 149 | 208 | +59 |
| New Hampshire | 1 | 65 | +64 |
| District of Columbia | 391 | 456 | +65 |
| Vermont | 58 | 146 | +88 |

**Note:** There are not enough black SAT test takers in the states of Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, or Wyoming to produce statistically significant results.

*Source: The College Board.* Table © *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.*

Significant SAT score improvements greater than the national average were also recorded by black students in North Carolina, Georgia, and South Carolina. In all of these states, the SAT is the most popular standardized test for college admissions. Thus, these broad SAT score gains are across the board. They include progress by all college-bound black students in these states. The huge gains in black SAT scores in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina since 1987 — more than double the national average — are especially encouraging. Black SAT scores also climbed at a rate higher than the national average in the heavily black states of Alabama, Texas, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Florida.

*"In some of our most populous states with a large number of black students in inner-city schools, the racial SAT gap is actually growing at a rate significantly higher than the national average."*

The largest drop in black SAT scores during the 1987 to 2001 period was in Vermont. There the average black score dropped by 88 points. But here again the small number of black SAT test takers in the state makes this decline statistically irrelevant. More troublesome are the drops in SAT scores in Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. Each of these jurisdictions has a large number of black students who attend inner-city high schools and these schools are almost certainly failing to teach black students the basic skills necessary to gain admission to colleges and universities. The fact that these states saw a decline in black SAT scores when nationwide there was a 20-point improvement in black SAT scores is cause for serious concern.

### State-by-State Changes in the Black-White SAT Gap

In the 12-year period between 1976 and 1987, the nationwide black-white scoring gap on the SAT narrowed significantly. The improvement in black scores was so strong that educators hoped that within a generation the black-white gap would disappear altogether. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Since 1988 the progress in closing the racial SAT gap has not only come to a screeching halt, it has reversed. In 1987 the black-white scoring gap nationwide stood at 191 points. Today the gap is 201 points.



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But once again there are wide variations among the states in their progress in closing the SAT scoring gap between the races. New Mexico had the most impressive gain during the period, reducing the racial SAT gap by 57 points. The four states with the greatest reduction in the black-white SAT gap were states in which only a small percentage of all college-bound high school students take the SAT. However, there were also significant reductions in the SAT gap in Georgia, Washington, and South Carolina, all states where the SAT is taken by a majority of college-bound students.

*"In states such as Maryland and Pennsylvania it is evident that many thousands of inner-city black students are not being taught the basic skills needed in order to compete for college admission."*

The largest increase in the black-white SAT gap was in Vermont. The black-white SAT scoring gap in Vermont grew from 58 points in 1987 to 146 points in 2001. But we remind the reader that only a very few black students took the SAT in the state of Vermont.

In some states with large numbers of black students who take the SAT, there was a very large increase in the black-white SAT gap during the 1987 to 2001 period. In Tennessee, Maryland, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, the racial SAT gap expanded by 20 points or more. In California, Illinois, and Massachusetts, the black-white SAT gap expanded by 15 points or more.

### Bleak Future for Black Students in Inner-City Schools

Clearly, the nationwide stagnation in closing the racial SAT gap is cause for great concern. But of even greater concern is the fact that in some of our most populous states such as Maryland and Pennsylvania, states with a large number of black students in inner-city schools, the SAT gap is actually growing at a rate significantly higher than the national average. In these particular states it is evident that thousands of inner-city black students are not being taught the basic skills needed in order to compete for college admission. Unless this trend can be reversed, a whole generation of black youth from inner-city school districts in our largest states will be doomed to the huge disadvantages almost always sustained by those who do not have a college education. JBHE

### Racial Preferences: Study Says No Need to Reduce Academic Standards

*A new report by researchers in Massachusetts concedes that racial preferences do indeed permit many black students to win admission to selective colleges over whites with higher academic qualifications. But, the authors say, all black students who are admitted meet the minimum standards required for whites and these black students are entirely capable of handling the academic curriculum at these schools.*

A new report issued by the Center for Education Policy and the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst entitled, *Diversity Among Equals: Educational Opportunity and the State of Affirmative Action in New England,* takes the position that selective New England colleges, which are active practitioners of affirmative action in student admissions, are not reducing academic standards in order to admit significant numbers of minority students.

*"All black students admitted to the prestigious New England colleges met the minimum academic standards required for whites."*

The researchers also challenge the theory that black students admitted under affirmative action are not qualified for admission and are not capable of doing the work at these selective private institutions. Also, the report cites data to show that these schools are not "lowering the bar" or reducing standards in order to admit black students.

The authors contend that their statistics show that all minority applicants to these schools meet a minimum academic standard that applies to all students admitted to the college or university.

The study first developed minimum academic standards for all white non-affirmative action admits. The study then determined that almost all of the black and other minority students who were admitted had academic qualifications equal or superior to the lowest qualified white applicant. Although the average black admit might have had lower high school grades and SAT scores than the average white student, all black students met the minimum academic standards required for whites.

The authors contend that without affirmative action New England colleges would not be able to achieve a significant level of racial diversity. The study notes that blacks and Hispanics make up 19 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old population in New England but only 10 percent of the college enrollments in the six-state region.



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